



IWAI PRO: John Dolan 087 2252772

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PRESS RELEASE

Grand Canal and Agricultural links to be celebrated during this years Ploughing Championships in Athy.

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) is delighted to announce its involvement at the Ploughing Championships this year. Given the historical significance of the role that the Grand Canal played in the development of the farming hinterlands that it served the IWAI believe that it is appropriate that the farming and navigation communities come together at this great event.

The site for the 2009 National Ploughing Championships begins at the R428 Athy / Stradbally road and runs right back to the Grand Canal. For the past few months a consultation process has been in place between the voluntary waterways organisation - Inland Waterways Association of Ireland via its North Barrow Branch, the National Ploughing Association, An Garda Síochána, Kildare County Council and Waterways Irelands to develop a strategy that would see both the Ploughing Championships and the Grand Canal celebrated side by side over the ploughing festival.

The IWAI North Barrow Branch will be hosting a Boating rally and events during the week of 19th to 26 September. Details on these will be announced in due course. The Heritage Boat Association who promotes the floating heritage of the canals by moving heritage boats around the system will be present.

The Grand Canal was controlled by the Grand Canal Company who ran its own boat fleet and also charged tolls to private boats known as hackers who also traded on the system.

The linkage between the Canal and the farming community dates back to 1924 when Athy and Carlow farmers campaigned successfully to have Ireland's first sugar beet factory established in Carlow. The principal form of transport of the beet to the factory was by horse drawn barge and rail, with local beet collected by horse and cart.

Of course this wasn't the only linkage between the farming communities and the navigation system as both the Grand Canal and the River Barrow carried significant commercial traffic linking all the towns on the system such as New Ross, Graiguenamanagh, Carlow and Athy to Dublin. On the way into Dublin malted barley was the main cargo which was used as a raw material in the manufacture of Guinness and of course on the way back the finished product was stout. Other goods carried included fertilisers, hides, malt and mineral waters.

Full details on the traffic management strategy from a pedestrian, boating and vehicular access will be published shortly; this will involve a temporary bridge placed in position over the canal for the event for pedestrian access opposite Cluain Mhuire.

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland will also have an exhibition stand in the Ploughing Championships site.

Notes to Editor

IWAI is a voluntary body of waterways enthusiasts, founded in 1954. It was formed to promote the development, use and maintenance of Ireland's navigable rivers and canals. When the Shannon was almost totally undeveloped for pleasure boating, the IWAI fought the building of low bridges, thus ensuring the development of the river as a national asset. Later the IWAI successfully fought the threatened closure of the Grand Canal in Dublin and has done much to instigate the improvement of the Barrow and to focus interest and activity on the restoration of the Royal Canal, the Ulster Canal and other closed navigations. The IWAI is the respected voice of the waterway user, lobbying and advising national and local government authorities as well as other bodies on all matters connected with the waterways including pollution and future developments. www.iwai.ie.